British Waterways London

THE BOW BACK RIVERS

A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE OLYMPICS

Regent's Canal – London W2

An Amsterdam for East London

The Bow Back Rivers offer a unique setting to help London win and host the 2012 Olympic Games and to become the jewel in the crown of the Lower Lea Valley. The five and a half kilometres of waterways provide an opportunity to shape the Olympic event around a network of rivers brimming with fascinating heritage and wildlife.

What the Bow Back Rivers can offer:

- 11km of colourful waterfronts and riverside cafés, river boats and open spaces
- Innovative transport opportunities such as water buses and water taxis
- Pedestrian links to the heart of the Olympic Zone
- A range of moorings for leisure and commercial boats
- Secure infrastructure routes for cabling and communications
- The setting for a colourful water festival

The 2012 Olympic Games could galvanise the revival of the Bow Back Rivers and provide a focus for the regeneration currently proposed for the area.

British Waterways London, which controls the rivers, has already begun their restoration. It believes that the network can play an important role in ensuring that London's 2012 Olympic Games create a living legacy the whole country can be proud of.

Just add water

The proposed 'Olympic Zone' straddles the Bow Back Rivers and adjacent blighted land. This area is recognised by the Mayor, London Development Agency, London Borough of Newham, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, Environment Agency and other key organisations as having great potential for economic, environmental and community regeneration.

British Waterways London has already embarked upon the rivers' restoration.

Works have focused on environmental improvements and accommodating the increased surface water from adjacent developments. In addition, preparatory studies and discussions with partners have begun to ensure that the waterways are integrated into the regeneration of the surrounding land.

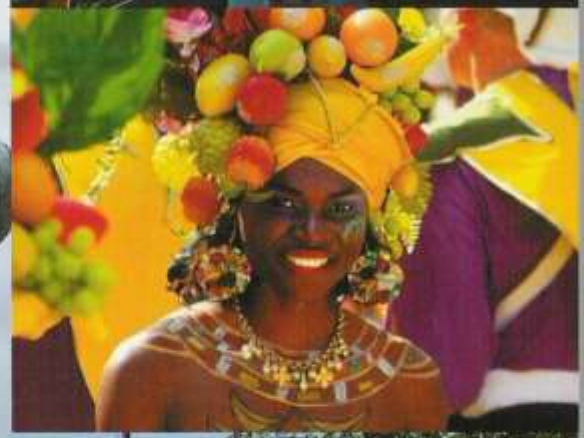
Perhaps surprisingly, much of the waterway infrastructure is in excellent condition and, although largely man-made, there are well-established habitats for many bird species and other wildlife. In fact, all that the Bow Back Rivers really need to bring them back to life is the co-ordinated and appropriate regeneration of the land around them and some targeted funding.

The time is now right for this to happen. The combination of excellent public transport connections, the proximity to Docklands, Victoria Park and the emerging Stratford City, the rich environment, large tracts of waterside land and promised investment could transform the Lower Lea Valley.

The rivers are not just a backdrop to the area.

They are a core part of its history, infrastructure and environment.

Properly treated, they can become a centrepiece of the 2012 Olympic Games.



The human race

This extensive network of waterways, islands and adjacent development land is a superb platform from which to launch London's bid. One of British Waterways London's suggestions is that they be brought to life to celebrate the capital's wealth of people and cultures. Using the theme 'The Human Race' the area could host a water festival of food, arts, dance and music in the period leading up to and including the Games.

The festival would aim to engage and enthuse London's many diverse communities to become part of the Olympic Games and part of the festival, making the event relevant to people across the world - a global celebration on water.

- Londoners would be given access to areas of waterside land and waterway to showcase the very best of their cultures, creating a miniature India, Africa or Britain to reflect the cultural diversity of the city.

- Stretches of the Bow Back Rivers could be temporarily transformed into waterways from different parts of the world – turning them into the lagoons of South East Asia, the beaches of the Caribbean or the rivers of West Africa.

- Boats could be shipped in to represent each zone – African canoes, Indian houseboats, South Asian dragonboats or Chinese Junks – to provide everything from floating accommodation, shops and restaurants to corporate hospitality and trip boats.

- Each area would run its own programme of activities, such as concerts, fireworks, children's activities and theatre which, in turn, would act as a focus for food stalls and markets for people travelling between the different sporting events.

The Olympic Games could kick off with a spectacular light and firework show, ignited by the arrival by boat of the Olympic Torch and lighting up the whole Lower Lea Valley.

An eye to the future

The energy and investment in the Olympic Games should leave a genuine inheritance for local people and all Londoners.

New hubs could be created at strategic locations around the network, attracting visitors to an area that has never before benefited from tourism. For instance:

- A **Water Science Centre** adjacent to Stratford City, with interactive, educational facilities for children and a research institute for global water conservation.
- Three Mills Island to become a **Heritage & Cultural Centre**, with upgraded educational facilities, a sculpture park, galleries, cafés, bookshops and a working tidal mill generating hydro-electricity.
- Old Ford Lock to house a **Youth Media Centre** to give training to young journalists and filmmakers in partnership with the British film and media industries.
- Carpenters Road Lock to become the centre for a **Green Village**, with innovative and environmentally friendly homes and offices and new wildlife habitats.

The capital costs of these projects could be offset against future development in the area, whereas the revenue funding could be raised through a combination of increased tourism and partnerships with regional and local organisations.

Nuts and bolts

The regeneration of the Bow Back Rivers and surrounding land would greatly improve access and transport in the area. A 'green grid' of footpaths, jogging tracks, cycleways, new parks and bridges would allow people to visit different attractions and events, and these could be connected further afield to the towpaths of the Regent's Canal, River Thames, River Lee Navigation and Limehouse Cut to create 'Olympic Routes' to the Games.

- Existing and new public **transport** could be supplemented with water taxis and bicycle rickshaws to carry athletes, officials and visitors between events. Access for boats to and from the waterways near to Olympic events could be controlled to maintain security.

- With the rivers providing a central framework for the area, it is essential that existing **wildlife** habitats are protected and enhanced, providing homes for everything from watervoles and otters to herons, kingfishers and the wealth of other birdlife in the area.

- The quality of the **built environment,** such as at Three Mills, should also be recognised and any regeneration should retain and celebrate the area's rich cultural heritage.

- **Sustainability** should be at the heart of any development. Barges on the River Lee Navigation, Thames and Bow Back Rivers would offer an environmentally friendly way of transporting construction materials and waste – and so keep traffic off the already congested roads of the East End.

A living legacy

The London Olympic Games 2012 would be a spectacular event in the history of the city – but the games will only take place for a brief period. It is paramount that any event delivers a tangible legacy for the capital which benefits people for many years to come.

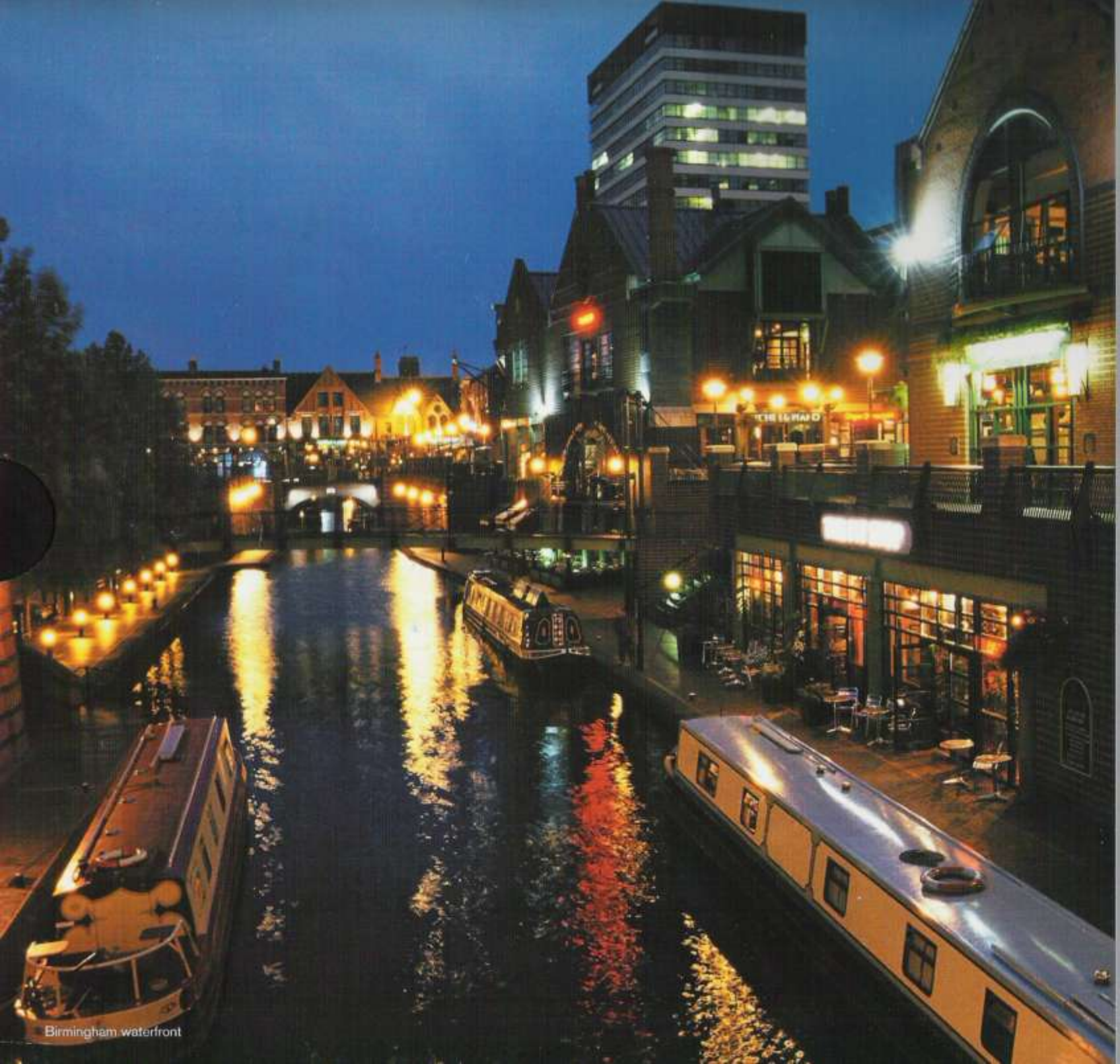
- Regenerating the Bow Back Rivers would leave a living legacy for London's people and wildlife, and create a diverse and sustainable **water city**.

- The combination of improved infrastructure and access, with an extensive environmental clean up, would create an enormous **waterpark**, with urban wildlife, plants and trees, and accessible to everyone through green links with the rest of London. The area would have some of the city's richest wildlife habitats and be among the most extensive open spaces in the capital.

- The creation of new visitor attractions and cultural centres would underline the Lower Lea Valley's position as London's Gateway to Europe and create opportunities for a new kind of community – a **modern Amsterdam for East London** with affordable eco-friendly homes, leisure facilities, retained local industry and new places of work.

The Bow Back Rivers will once again become a thriving part of London's East End and the UK's 2,000-mile canal network.

Canalside café, Maida Vale, London W9



Birmingham waterfront

Next steps

British Waterways has a long track record in waterway-based regeneration and played an important role in the success of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester.

The revival of the Bow Back Rivers is one of the organisation's national priorities and work on them is already underway. Much of the planning for the project is in hand and the rivers' infrastructure is structurally sound.

The Olympic Games could be the catalyst to unlock the rivers' full potential through the co-ordinated regeneration of the surrounding land.

British Waterways London is keen to share its plans and to discuss how these could contribute to London's bid to host the Olympic Games in 2012.

British Waterways is a public corporation with responsibility for 2,000 miles of canals, rivers and docks across Britain.

In the capital, British Waterways London cares for 100 miles of canals and rivers and 110 acres of docks. It works with public, private and voluntary organisations to unlock the full environmental, economic and social benefits of its waterways.

British Waterways London

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